

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-02 USIA-06 L-03 PRS-01 /023 W
-----161813Z 095465 /50

R 161354Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6241

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CAIRO 10094

FOR NEA/EGY AND CU FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SCUL, EG
SUBJECT: HOVING CONTROVERSY WITH MININFO

REF: (A) CAIRO 8570, (B) STATE 115725

SUMMARY: IN LONG-DELAYED MEETING WITH EL SAWI TODAY, I RAISED REFERENCE SUBJECT AND STRESSED IMPORTANCE AMICABLE RESOLUTION. EL SAWI CLAIMED ISSUE IS SOLELY IRREGULAR CLEANING CONTRACT FOR WHICH "AN EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL" (UNNAMED) RESPONSIBLE. ISSUE SHOULD NOT AFFECT EXCELLENT US/EGYPTIAN CULTURAL COOPERATION. NOR IS IT DIRECTED AT MET OR HOVING OR EVEN BRITISH CLEANING COMPANY INVOLVED. PRESS ATTACKS ON HOVING HAD BEEN UNAUTHORIZED. INVESTIGATION OF CLEANING CONTRACT ORDERED BY EL SAWI NOW UNDERWAY AND HE HAD INSTRUCTED HIS DEPUTY, ARABY, MAKE NO STATEMENT OF ANY KIND UNTIL STUDY COMPLETED IN ABOUT TEN DAYS TIME. EL SAWI SAID HE WOULD WELCOME HOVING VISIT, BUT SUGGESTED SUCH MEETING MIGHT BE MOST USEFUL AFTER INVESTIGATION REPORT COMPLETED. SUGGEST DEPT CONVEY ACCOUNT OF MY TALK WITH EL SAWI TO HOVING WITH RECOMMENDATION THAT AN EARLY VISIT BY HIM WOULD HELP CLEAR THE AIR.
END SUMMARY.

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1. ALTHOUGH I HAD ASKED FOR MEETING WITH MINISTER CULTURE AND INFORMATION ABDEL MONEIM EL SAWI IN EARLY JUNE, HE DID NOT RECEIVE ME UNTIL TODAY. HE APOLOGIZED FOR HIS INABILITY TO DO SO EARLIER, ALLEGING PRESSURE OF WORK AS REASON.

2. I TOLD HIM THAT BOTH WASHINGTON AND I HAVE BEEN

DISTURBED TO HEAR OF THE APPARENT CONTROVERSY THAT HAS DEVELOPED BETWEEN HIS MINISTRY AND HOVING. ONE OF THE THINGS I HAVE BEEN MOST PLEASED ABOUT IS EXCELLENT COOPERATION BETWEEN EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES DEPARTMENT AND METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, AS EVIDENCED BY TUTANKHAMON EXHIBIT. I DWELT AT LENGTH ON THE SUCCESS OF THAT EXHIBIT AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN GIVING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC A GREATER APPRECIATION OF EGYPTIAN PAST. OUT OF THIS ALSO COMES GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF EGYPT'S PRESENT ASPIRATIONS. IT WOULD BE A SHAME TO HAVE THAT POSITIVE IMPRESSION HURT BY WHAT IS ESSENTIALLY A MINOR DISAGREEMENT.

3. HOVING HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH DEPT TO EXPRESS HIS CONCERN ABOUT WHAT HE CONSIDERS UNFAIR AND UNJUSTIFIABLE EGYPTIAN PRESS ATTACKS. FROM WHAT I HAD SEEN OF THE PRESS STORIES, I TENDED TO AGREE WITH HIM. I HAD NEVERTHELESS URGED HOVING TO COME TO EGYPT TO DISCUSS ENTIRE MATTER WITH EL SAWI, BUT HE IS UNDERSTANDABLY RELUCTANT TO DO SO IN FACE OF THESE PRESS ATTACKS. IN FOLLOWING MATTER IN THE PRESS, I WAS GLAD THAT THERE HAVE BEEN NO SUCH ATTACKS IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS. I WOULD WELCOME ANY SUGGESTIONS THE MINISTER MIGHT HAVE TO MAKE.

4. AFTER LISTENING CAREFULLY, EL SAWI AGREED THAT THE DISPUTE IS A MINOR ONE. IT SHOULD IN NO WAY AFFECT THE EXCELLENT US/EGYPTIAN CULTURAL COOPERATION. NOR DID HE WISH IT TO AFFECT COOPERATION WITH THE MET. IN FACT, IT HAD TO DO SOLELY WITH WHAT HE STILL CONSIDERS AN CONFIDENTIAL

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IRREGULAR AND OVER-PRICED CLEANING CONTRACT, WHICH "AN EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL" HAD CONTRACTED FOR THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM. THE MUSEUM, AS HE SAW IT, HAD NOT BENEFITED FROM THIS. (WHEN I MENTIONED THAT THE MUSEUM LOOKS MUCH BETTER OF LATE, HE ARGUED THAT THIS WAS DUE TO OTHER REFORMS THAT HE HAD INSTITUTED.) EVEN WITH RESPECT TO THE CONTRACT, HE HAD NO COMPLAINT ABOUT HOVING OR FOR THAT MATTER THE BRITISH COMPANY INVOLVED. IT WAS SOLELY THE "EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL" AND THE MANAGER OF THE COMPANY. THE PRESS ATTACKS ON HOVING, THE MINISTER CLAIMED, HAD BEEN UNAUTHORIZED. EL SAWI HAD ORDERED THAT AN INVESTIGATION BE CONDUCTED OF THE CLEANING CONTRACT AND NEWS OF THIS HAD SOMEHOW LEAKED TO THE PRESS. HE HAD THEREUPON INSTRUCTED HIS DEPUTY, ARABY, TO MAKE NO STATEMENT OF ANY KIND UNTIL THE RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION WERE IN AND COULD BE STUDIED. ASKED WHEN THIS MIGHT BE, HE THOUGHT IN ABOUT TEN DAYS TIME.

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6242

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 CAIRO 10094

FOR NEA/EGY AND CU FROM AMBASSADOR

5. EL SAWI INDICATED THAT HE WOULD WELCOME A VISIT BY HOVING TO DISCUSS ANYTHING THE LATTER MIGHT WISH TO TAKE UP, BUT SUGGESTED SUCH MEETING MIGHT BE MOST USEFUL AFTER THE INVESTIGATION REPORT IS COMPLETED. HE AGREED WITH MY POINT THAT IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE AIR BE CLEARED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE SO THAT THIS COULD WILL NOT CONTINUE TO HANG OVER GOE/MET COOPERATION. HE REITERATED THAT HIS ACTION IN SUSPENDING THE CLEANING CONTRACT WAS IN NO WAY DIRECTED AGAINST HOVING, BUT SOLELY AGAINST ALLEGED IRREGULARITIES ON THE PART OF "AN EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL." HE FULLY RECOGNIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUCCESSFUL TUT EXHIBIT IN THE US AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT HE MIGHT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND THE OPENING CEREMONIES IN ONE OF THE CITIES ON THE TUT EXHIBIT'S ITINERARY.

6. COMMENT: EL SAWI IS TRICKY AND HAS NEVER BEEN OVERLY WELL DISPOSED TOWARD US. NEVERTHELESS, I THINK IT IS IN HOVING'S INTEREST TO TAKE THE MINISTER AT FACE VALUE WHEN HE SAYS THAT NONE OF HIS ACTIONS WERE AIMED AT HOVING OR THE MET. ALTHOUGH GAMAL MOKHTAR'S NAME WAS NEVER MENTIONED, HE IS CLEARLY THE "EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL" WHOM EL SAWI HAD IN MIND IN CITING ALLEGED IRREGULARITIES. I CAN APPRECIATE HOVING'S RELUCTANCE TO INVOLVE HIMSELF IN INTERNECINE FEUDING BETWEEN EL SAWI, ARABY AND MOKHTAR,
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BUT THE FACT REMAINS THAT HE WILL HAVE TO WORK WITH

EL SAWI SO LONG AS THE LATTER REMAINS MINISTER.
I CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT A VISIT BY HOVING IS
DESIRABLE TO CLEAR THE AIR. HE MIGHT EVEN BE ABLE TO
HELP MOKHTAR OUT OF SOME OF HIS CURRENT DIFFICULTIES.
MOKHTAR, WHOM I SAW LAST NIGHT, CONTINUE TO BE IN THE
DUMPS AND UNCERTAIN ABOUT HIS FUTURE.

7. SUGGEST YOU CONTACT HOVING AND CONVEY ABOVE TO HIM.
I AM ALSO BRIEFING HARRISON ON MY TALK WITH EL SAWI.
EILTS

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